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SUBJECT: RUSSIA-GEORGIA CONFLICT: HOLY SEE FOCUSED ON CIVILIANS AND
HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

REF: STATE 89769

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Holy See is very concerned about the conflict in Georgia, and in particular about the needs of civilians affected by the fighting. The Pope has publicly addressed these concerns in recent statements. The Holy See has not been asked to mediate in the conflict. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) PolChief delivered reftel demarche to Monsignor Julio Murat, Director for the Caucasus at the Holy See Secretariat of State Second Section (MFA equivalent), on August 22. Murat noted that the Pope had made two public statements regarding the conflict, and that other statements may follow. The Pope first appealed for peace from Bressanone (northern Italy) on August ¶10. Later, on August 17, from his summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, the Pope asked the international community for assistance for refugees and internally displaced persons, and called for humanitarian corridors to be opened between South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia. (Note: See paragraph 5 for the Pope's August 17 statement).

¶3. (U) Murat reiterated the Holy See's concern for civilians and hoped that all parties in the conflict would respect and allow the work of humanitarian agencies.

¶4. (SBU) Murat was not aware of the comments that Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti --the Holy See Nuncio in Tbilisi-- had made regarding the availability of the Vatican to mediate in the conflict, but confirmed that the parties had not approached the Holy See to request its mediation. (Note: During an interview with Catholic News Services on August 21, Gugerotti stated that "We are always ready to consider a request for mediation and to offer our services. But the parties have to want this, and so far no one has asked anything of us." End note.)

¶5. (U) Following is Post's informal translation of the Pope's reference to the conflict in Georgia, delivered during his weekly public address on August 17:

Begin Text:

With great concern I continue to follow attentively the situation in Georgia, and feel particular affinity with the victims of the conflict. While offering prayers for the dead and expressing sincere condolences to those in mourning, I appeal for generosity in responding to the desperate situation of the refugees, in particular women and children who lack even the basic necessities of life. I ask for the opening, without further delay, of humanitarian corridors between the region of South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia, so that the dead who have been abandoned may receive a dignified burial, the wounded may be adequately treated, and people who desire to do so may be allowed to reach their loved ones. It is important that ethnic minorities in the conflict region be protected and their inalienable fundamental rights respected. I hope that the

cease-fire, reached with help from the European Union, will last and become a stable peace, and I call on the international community to make every effort to reach a permanent solution, through dialogue and mutual good will.

End text.

GLENDON